

<b>Sustainable Development Select Committee</b>		
Title	Beckenham Place Park Regeneration scrutiny paper	
Contributor	Executive Director for Customer Services	Item 8
Class	Part 1 (open)	30 Jan 2019

## **1. Purpose**

- 1.1 This report to the Sustainable Development Select Committee sets out the progress made on the regeneration of Beckenham Place Park to date, and the programme and plans to complete the restoration of the whole park and its buildings.
- 1.2 Since the closure of golf in the park, at the end of October 2016, HLF funds were secured to restore Beckenham Place Park and many of its listed buildings, (awarded Dec 2016). Detailed designs were worked up, activities in the park have been expanded considerably, and the HLF restoration works are now nearing completion.
- 1.3 This paper sets out the achievements of the project to date, clarifies what the HLF project will deliver, and sets out the road map to ensure the whole park benefits from significant regeneration over the coming years.

## **2. Summary**

- 2.1 The HLF 'Parks for People' bid set out a commitment to restore the landscape of the whole of Beckenham Place Park, as well as several listed buildings – the stable block, the gardener's cottage and the externals of Southend Lodge and gatehouse.
- 2.2 Lewisham Council also committed funds to restore the cottages within the stable yard, on the understanding that rental income would subsequently be forthcoming. The cottages are currently being restored and will be let on this basis.
- 2.3 In addition, the GLA committed funds to the project (£500k) to fund the restoration of the lake and tree planting on the site.

- 2.4 The regeneration of the part of the park to the east of the railway line was to be carried out in conjunction with the Environment Agency (EA). The EA were leading the project which was part of a large, 10 site flood alleviation scheme which sought to protect Lewisham and Catford town centres from fluvial flooding. Beckenham Place Park was to be the holding reservoir for fluvial waters in times of exceptionally high flow. However, in summer of 2018 the EA concluded that the cost of the designed scheme had risen too significantly from the initial cost estimates to be cost effective or deliverable within the government funding protocols they work within. As a result, the scheme was abandoned.
- 2.5 The regeneration of this part of Beckenham Place Park was to be delivered as part of this flood alleviation scheme. Lewisham Council had committed funds to the flood scheme, as the EA's key partner in the scheme, but the landscape improvements for the park would be delivered as part of this whole. Whilst the HLF expected that the whole of the park would be restored, and the funding bid to the HLF was made on that basis, none of the HLF project budget was committed to the eastern side of the park, as financially this stood as a separate package, to be delivered primarily by the EA.
- 2.6 The vision for the western side of the park is now coming to fruition. The park is already much busier, despite the significant earthworks, and the range of people enjoying it and the activities taking place in the park is much more diverse than it was. Key landscape features and buildings are being restored, and the park is becoming the well used and well loved community asset it should be.
- 2.7 However, as we approach the completion of the first phase of Beckenham Place Park, there is more work required to make the most of this unique open space for the community.
- 2.8 Further investment is required for the eastern part of the park, and further work is required to define the best medium to long term strategies for the two key remaining buildings in the park that have not benefitted from the Parks for People HLF funds – the Foxgrove, and the mansion house itself.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1 The Sustainable Development Select Committee is asked to :
- Note the content of the report

## 4. Policy context

- 4.1 Lewisham's long standing vision is: 'Together, we will make Lewisham the best place in London to live, work and learn'. This vision was developed following extensive consultation with Lewisham residents, public sector agencies, local business, voluntary and community sector organisations, and has been adopted by all our partners. It continues to be a bold ambition that stretches and motivates the Council and its partners to set priorities and deliver services in ways that achieve our vision.
- 4.2 The restoration of Beckenham Place Park will create a significant open space, venue and leisure facility that genuinely impacts the quality of life of thousands of residents. A park of this scale and history could make a substantial contribution to the regeneration of the south of borough, helping to engender a sense of place and pride in the area. Already we are beginning to see this happening. As the park's reputation, activities and events grow over the next few years, the positive impact of the open space on the surrounding areas will be felt to a greater and greater extent.
- 4.3 The key strategic document for Lewisham and our partners is the Sustainable Community Strategy 2008-2020, "Shaping our Future". In this document, the strategic partners set out six priorities – creating communities that are:
- Ambitious and achieving
  - Safer
  - Empowered and responsible
  - Clean, green and liveable
  - Healthy, active and enjoyable
  - Dynamic and prosperous
- 4.4 A large and thriving open space can make a contribution to local communities in each and every priority area above. The restoration of the park through the Parks for People project means that Beckenham Place Park is beginning to have much more relevance and a much greater positive impact on the communities which surround it. To ensure that the park makes the maximum possible positive contribution to the communities of Bellingham, Downham and Whitefoot particularly, it is important that further investment is secured to improve eastern part of the park.

## 5. The park and the vision for regeneration

5.1 Two years ago (April 2017) a paper was brought to Sustainable Development Committee describing the project and its aims. The report stated

5.2 *“Beckenham Place Park is Lewisham’s largest park by far; indeed it is the one of the largest parks in London, and South east London’s biggest open space. At 95 hectares it is 30% bigger than Greenwich Park. It boasts ancient woodland, meadow, parkland, a river and several historic buildings. It was originally acquired by the London County Council to be the key amenity space for the new estates of Bellingham and Downham.*

*Yet today the park is little known among the wider community and is used significantly less than many other Lewisham parks, despite its size. A usage and movement survey of the park was carried out by Building Design Partnership (BDP) in 2013. In addition, in November 2015 and April 2016 a further usage survey was carried out. Together these surveys establish a fairly robust picture of usage throughout the year. They conclude that the park currently attracts around 220,000 visits a year, which is only around a quarter of the number of visits made to Brockwell Park.”*

5.3 At the heart of the vision to regenerate Beckenham Place Park and its buildings has always been the aspiration to significantly increase the use of the park, both in terms of visitor numbers and in terms of the diversity of those visitors. Already, there has been significant movement in this direction, with visitor numbers increasing from 220,000 a year in 2015-16 to 400,000 in 2018 and an increasing proportion of visitors from non-white ethnic groups. Previously few children or families visited the park; already the age demographic visiting more closely matches that of the neighbouring populations. Please see appendix 3 for more details.

5.4 In order to engage a much broader and larger audience to benefit from the park, it is important to recognise the breadth of appeal and opportunities it affords. To ensure the regeneration plans built on the full breadth of the parks potential, five themes were developed:

Themes for the park’s regeneration:

- Community
- Heritage
- Outdoor activity
- Nature
- Relaxation and play

These themes have shaped the development of the park over the past two years – both in terms of the landscape change, and in terms of the activities and events which have been offered.

#### 5.4.1 Community

Already we have seen

- Hundreds of volunteers involved in tree planting
- A hugely successful Straw bale garden – two years running – maintained by volunteers
- Volunteers helping with many events from the Festival of Lights to the Flower and dog show, to the outdoor cinema events.
- Volunteers of all ages and all walks of life – with two special schools regularly using and volunteering in the park

The new community garden, (which replaces the temporary straw bale garden) based around the restored gardener's cottage will create a focus for horticultural volunteers in the summer, and a base for winter activities such as wood craft and woodland maintenance.

The restoration is making Beckenham Place Park into a place where community gathers – where people from all walks of life and all ages come together to volunteer, to learn, to celebrate, to enjoy events and the great outdoors, together.

#### 5.4.2 Heritage

Beckenham Place Park is a place full of history. Its listed buildings are much loved by local people, and the regeneration of the park aims to bring alive the stories of the park and its buildings to all park users. As the mansion is the dominant building in the park, built by John Cator in the late eighteenth century, the regeneration looks particularly to restore the eighteenth century landscape of the Cator estate, for twenty-first century use. The restoration of the lake and pleasure grounds, and the relocation of the current car park away from the mansion's curtilage and restoration of the carriageway drive will redefine the park's landscape as an attractive setting in line with the principles favoured by Historic England and the council's conservation officers.

The restoration of the eighteenth century stable block and stable yard, will create a historic and beautiful arrival point and hub for the park, providing a café, public toilets and an education centre, and a gateway to the gardens and the park beyond.

Through the regeneration of the park, many key heritage features will be restored, and the history of the park will be brought to life through landscape and interpretation.

The Open House events which have been held as part of London's Open House weekend in September 2017 and 2018 have brought in hundreds to people and given a real opportunity to bring the Georgian heritage of the park to life, and demonstrate how this has shaped the restoration of the landscape, as well as the buildings.

#### 5.4.3 Outdoor activity

As south east London's largest park, Beckenham Place Park offers many opportunities for outdoor activities that other urban parks simply cannot support. ParkRun is established in the park with around 170 runners each week. Once the restoration is complete, a children's park run will also begin. New paths and trails will encourage park users to explore the whole park, - to walk, run, and (on some paths) to cycle through the landscape.

Scouts groups, orienteering groups, running clubs and other sporting groups are now making use of the park, and guided family cycle rides are now taking place. The BMX facility, built in the eastern part of the park in close proximity to the skate park, has been very successful, offering open access riding, club sessions and sessions for specific school groups and women's riding.

Perhaps the most unique and exciting sports offer the park will make is that of outdoor swimming. The project team is currently working to define the best means of safely operating the lake as a place for wild swimming – both in the summer – where the potential audience is much larger – and also throughout the year.

#### 5.4.4 Nature

Beckenham Place Park is Lewisham's most important site for nature conservation. With its varied habitats of ancient woodland, acid grassland, river and meadow, the site already supports considerable biodiversity. The regeneration of the park introduces two new habitats identified as priorities within Greater London – open water and wet woodland.

The project has planted 3 hectares of new woodland following award of two rounds of funding from the Mayor of London, and is expanding the areas of meadow and improving the management of existing woodlands, removing

invasive species and reducing the amount of holly which shades out the native ground flora.

The regeneration of the park is also helping park users to engage with and to appreciate the wealth of nature in Beckenham Place park, through new trails, interpretation, education, events and through the accessibility of the landscape itself. Many people commented in consultation events that they appreciate Beckenham Place Park as a 'piece of countryside'. This sense of openness and reconnection with nature is an important aspect of the park, and the regeneration serves to strengthen this special character.

#### 5.4.5 Relaxation and play

In a busy urban area it is important that communities have places to relax; where adults and children alike can 'play'. New play provision has been installed as part of the pleasure grounds, close to the lake and café. But just as importantly, there will be ample opportunities to explore, to discover, to relax, and to 'breathe'.

**Please refer to Appendix 1, a masterplan of the park.**

## 6. The eastern side of the park

- 6.1 As stated in section 2.4 above, plans for the eastern side of the park have collapsed due to the withdrawal of the Environment Agency's flood scheme. In order to bring the original vision of Beckenham Place Park's restoration to fruition, significant funding is required to provide key facilities in this part of the park. This is particularly important to help Downham residents, living on this side of the park, to make use of the open space and feel connection and ownership of it.
- 6.2 Facilities and investment are required that brings this part of the park to life and enhances its aesthetic and habitat value. The original plans for the whole park placed the major play area for the space in this part of the park. Currently there is little formal play provision included in the scheme – yet we know this is a key draw – not only for children, but for their parents and grandparents too. If we are to realise the vision to triple use of the park and increase the connection local communities feel to the park, (therefore increasing the benefits it brings them) a major play area is needed here, as well as other key facilities – toilets, a refreshment kiosk or café, and a more welcoming entrance to the open space.
- 6.3 The Environment Agency have also expressed a desire to work with us to make the most of the major natural asset in this part of the park – the River

Ravensbourne. Currently park users, even those that walk along the riverside path, can scarcely see the river at all. There is huge potential to bring character and form to the parkland, enhance biodiversity, and provide modest flood storage by making small scape alterations to the river and banks, and introducing some wetland areas. This part of the park could be transformed in a similar way to Ladywell fields or Sutcliffe Park.

- 6.4 Funding in the region of £1.8 - £2m is required to make this a reality. The project team is beginning to pull together a funding strategy and timeline for the project. It is hoped that external funds might be secured from the EA and from the GLA and discussions are underway with these institutions. It is likely that the Council will also need to make a capital contribution, though this would be of less than the £2m the Council had indicated it would provide for the planned flood alleviation scheme here.

## 7. Project timetable and transformation to date

- 7.1 It is exciting to see many years of work come to fruition. Restoration works on the western side of the park will be completed this summer, and the new era for Beckenham Place Park will begin in earnest. The table below tracks some major milestones in the journey – past and future.

<b>Milestone</b>	<b>Date</b>
Golf course closed	Nov 2016
12,000 trees planted	Feb 2017
BMX track opened	Sept 2017
Planning permission granted	Oct 2017
Works started on site	April 2018
Environment Agency scheme collapse	Summer 2018
Works completed on western side of park	May 2019
Opening celebration	20 <sup>th</sup> July 2019
Seeking funding for eastern side of the park	2019
Programme for eastern side of the park works dependent on funding	Earliest possible completion summer 2021

- 7.2 Although the physical transformation of the park has not yet been completed, the change in use and popularity of the park has already been marked, providing a strong indication that the project will not only fulfil but exceed the original vision to triple use and diversify audiences.



The community engagement officer has been instrumental in making this possible. Please see appendix 2 for details on the community engagement and volunteering activities in the park to date. This post is funded through the HLF project until 2021.

There are also funds available in the HLF budget to help to market the park and the commercial opportunities it could support. The project team are currently discussing how these funds can be best spent to achieve the vision of the project and ensure the park's transformation is sustainable in the long term.

## **8. Buildings within the park**

8.1 The HLF 'Parks for People' transformation of the park delivers the restoration of several key listed buildings in the park:

- The Grade II listed eighteenth century stable block will become a café and education centre
- Southend Lodge and Gate house (Grade II listed) will be restored externally to create a welcoming and historic entrance to the park from Beckenham Hill Road
- The Victorian gardener's cottage will be fully restored to become a volunteer hub for the park
- The stable yard cottages will be restored (Council funded) and let out commercially for uses related to the park.

8.2 The mansion, and Foxgrove sit outside of the scope of the current project. (Please see appendix 1 for locations.) The current status of these buildings is as follows:

### **Mansion**

A meanwhile use lease was granted to use the mansion when the golf course was closed in October 2016. This use has ensured that the building remains protected and that the Council avoids significant security costs; it has also ensured that a café and disabled toilet remains available until the wider works are carried out. The building, which is managed by RJK properties, contains a mix of uses including a café, yoga, craft and artists' studios as well as rooms to rent for a variety of uses. The management of the mansion have worked collaboratively with the Council's project team to support a variety of events aimed at attracting new audiences to the park including free open air cinema, local markets, food & flower festivals etc.

The building requires significant investment, probably in the region of £3-4 million to bring it back into good condition and to improve access throughout the building. Securing the necessary funds to complete this restoration through a

funder will take some years and viable long term plan for its use will have to be developed.

### **Foxgrove**

The original golf clubhouse tucked away at the edge of the park's woodland is currently occupied by property guardians as a cost effective way to secure it against damage. The building requires investment of around £250k to bring it into good condition.

## **9. Conclusion**

9.1 Substantial progress has been made to make Beckenham Place Park the well used and well loved community asset it should be. The capital works on the western side of the park are now coming to completion, and the project team is confident that large numbers of local people will enjoy the restored landscape and facilities this summer.

Many activities are being planned, and some further events - all of which will draw in new audiences to enjoy the park.

The next few months are crucial – not only to establish the landscape and get Beckenham place park firmly on the map, both locally and further afield – but also to secure the funding needed for the eastern side of the park and to define the medium to long term strategy for the Foxgrove and the mansion.

## **10. Background documents and report author**

10.1 Alison Taylor - Project Manager x48758

Appendices:

- 1) Masterplan – showing the restored landscape
- 2) Community engagement highlights 2017-18
- 3) Audience development, Beckenham Place Park 2016 – 2018

If you require any further information about this report please contact Alison Taylor on [alison.taylor@lewisham.gov.uk](mailto:alison.taylor@lewisham.gov.uk)

Appendix 1



## Appendix 2

### Community engagement activity highlights, Beckenham Place Park

- Regular weekly volunteering since January 2017, now with 14 volunteers each week (over a morning and an afternoon session). Undertaking a range of activities including woodland management
- Conisborough college regularly coming on Fridays to undertake volunteering
- 3 classes from Drumbeat school, Downham campus, attending 5 sessions each in the park this academic year, to create nature-related items (eg a bug house) that will be homed in the volunteer hub. This follows on from a series of 3 introductory sessions in the summer term of 2018.
- A woodland management plan for the park written (by independent ecologist) and approved by Forestry Commission, including a grant to write it
- Regular, free activities during half term and school holidays for younger children (especially nature related) attended by up to a 50 children and 28 adults (summer going on a bear hunt activity)
- BMX club sessions every Sunday
- Wednesday weekly BMX sessions female only sessions (BMXercise)
- Quarterly park users forums (along 2 themes) attended by about 15 volunteers
- Flower show committee to deliver second flower show in June 2019 after highly successful one with 3000 people in June 2018.
- 4 volunteers trained up to run a twitter account for the park (@beckenhampark)
- Developed strong volunteer identity – branded t shirts for regular volunteers, volunteers offered Lewisham Local cards once contributed 12 hours to the park
- over 90 volunteers on list, many help at one off events such as Open House London
- Park email newsletter list with over 1000 people on it.
- Tree planting on eastern side through Woodland Trust community trees initiative – 30 young people and parents came one Saturday morning in December
- Small scale tree planting by Sedgehill students of trees they ordered through the Woodland Trust
- Trees for Cities tree planting event, attracting over 150 volunteers
- Park run, with an average of 170 runners each week. Featured on Five Live sport on Christmas day – good promotion for the park. One runner was doing his 250<sup>th</sup> parkrun that day, at BPP and one regular volunteer was interviewed about the benefits of volunteering.
- Junior park run (2k course) in process of being set up to start once Homesteads completed.

## Appendix 2

- Small scale forest school practitioners working in the park on a fairly regular basis
- Successful public events eg Festival of Lights, flower and dog show, cinema events
- Working towards making the park Dementia Friendly. Have applied to be a partner organisation for Capital Growth – to find out in February 2019. Network of food growers around the capital, with links to wider volunteering and training around horticulture.
- Successfully participated in first National Park open city week in July 2018. Will repeat in 2019.
- Have put the park forward as a location to host event(s) as part of Lewisham's first Creative Ageing Festival in October 2019
- Links made with Sydenham Garden so that their co-workers can consider moving on to BPP once their projects finish with Sydenham Garden. Project worker from Sydenham Garden has accompanied 3 groups of co-workers to BPP to introduce them to the park over the last year
- Community engagement officer part of numerous local networks eg Bellingham Inter-Agency, #together event on 26 January (MET police, at Athelney School), and developing links with Phoenix Community Housing, through the new Head of Community Regeneration
- 2 guided walks/activities for Sedgehill school GCSE Geography students in line with their curriculum on deciduous woodland